

ON THE NET

Literacy: Reading on the Net

Jean W. LeLoup

SUNY Cortland

Robert Ponterio

SUNY Cortland

Most foreign language (FL) professionals agree that developing reading skills in a second language (L2) is of paramount importance in the whole scheme of second language acquisition. First, written texts provide a great deal of comprehensible input. Second, many language learners can frequently read at levels far more advanced than their speaking abilities indicate (Knutson, 1998). Third, the improvement of reading skills and employment of reading strategies also foster development and refinement of literacy skills in general. Fourth, reading is a skill that can be maintained after the cessation of formal study (Omaggio Hadley, 1993).

With the proliferation of FL websites on the Internet, language learners can readily find a plethora of reading materials to help them improve their literacy skills. For the self-motivated learner, access to target language media offers virtually unlimited opportunities to practice reading and increase proficiency. One subcategory here is the daily newspaper. What used to be available only as realia carefully brought back from trips abroad, laminated or photocopied and displayed or employed for classroom use, is now readily accessible on a daily basis on the Internet. On-line newspapers provide daily access to new, up-to-date, and interesting reading material from practically every country in the world. Several sites on the web provide links to newspapers and magazines around the world.



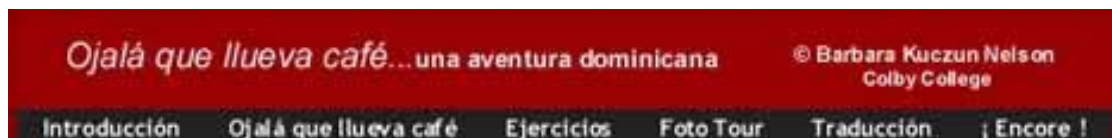
This site allows the reader to browse by region and media category, including newspapers, magazines, city guides, radio, and even television. Listings are quite extensive. France, for example, has 26 newspapers online; Ecuador, 10; Argentina, 40; Russia, 11; Sweden, 48; Germany, 64; Kenya, 3; Japan, 54; China, 8. Even Brunei and Tahiti are represented (1 each).



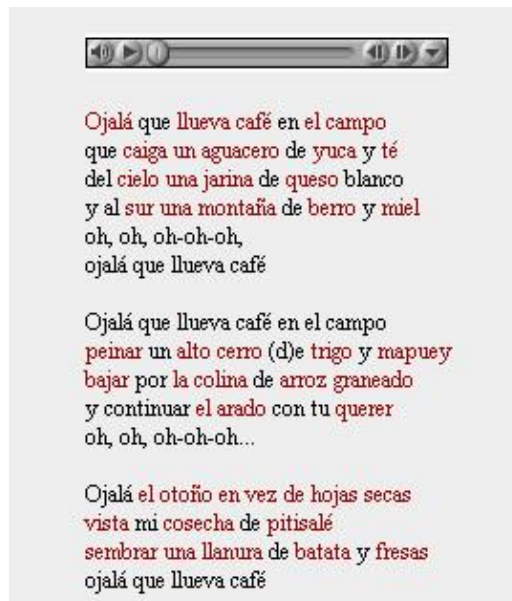
The Inkternational News Links is another source for online news links. It contains major international news links as well as links to international weather sites.

While these sites do provide access to current information through various media types, language learners needing more structure may not benefit fully from their use without some guidance from a FL instructor and the implementation of planned, meaningful activities. Not a criticism of these sites, they simply do not provide the language support that helps non-natives develop reading proficiency. The Web, with its interactive capabilities, is an ideal medium for providing such support through the annotation of texts, but very few sites using this strategy are available as yet.

One example of using annotation to assist in reading comprehension and L2 acquisition is a site created by Dr. Barbara Kuczun Nelson at Colby College:



The popular song, "Ojalá que llueva café" by Juan Luis Guerra of the Dominican Republic, is the vehicle in this activity which promotes literacy and provides an opportunity for the language learner to engage in a reading exercise that uses meaningful language. The words of the text that are glossed appear in a different color and are active links to cues for meaning. Unlike typical WWW links that bring the viewer to a new page, clicking on these links makes the cues appear within the original page so that the text being read remains visible to the reader while the cue is displayed.



The cues that appear when the reader clicks on the glossed vocabulary take various forms. Some are text explanations only, generally using a combination of target language and English words. Others are pictorial representations of the meaning of the word or phrase.

YUCA



Ojalá que llueva café en el campo
que caiga un aguacero de yuca y té
del cielo una jarina de queso blanco
y al sur una montaña de berro y miel
oh, oh, oh-oh-oh,
ojalá que llueva café

Ojalá que llueva café en el campo
peinar un alto cerro (d)e trigo y mapuey
bajar por la colina de arroz graneado
y continuar el arado con tu querer
oh, oh, oh-oh-oh...

Still others employ previously glossed vocabulary in a target language sentence to illustrate the sense of the phrase.

El campesino está BAJANDO por la colina.



Ojalá que llueva café en el campo
peinar un alto cerro (d)e trigo y mapuey
bajar por la colina de arroz graneado
y continuar el arado con tu querer
oh, oh, oh-oh-oh...

Ojalá el otoño en vez de hojas secas
vista mi cosecha de pitisalé
sembrar una llanura de batata y fresas
ojalá que llueva café

All cues are closed by clicking. The text and concomitant audio representation are divided into reasonable portions for presentation in a language classroom. The language learner can readily assimilate these short portions with the assistance of the glosses and the accompaniment of the music. The author has also provided a full translation of the text in case of any doubts.

In addition to the cultural references glossed in the text, a "foto tour" is available to provide even more connections to the target language culture depicted in the lyrics.

La República Dominicana

Photo Acknowledgements and Copyright Information

Introducción Ojalá que llueva café Ejercicios Foto Tour Traducción ¡Encore !

Páginas de fotos ► 1 2 3 4 5

Click on a photo to see the full size version.



Finally, the author has created a series of grammar activities which coincide with the text, in particular, the use of subjunctive. This rather complex aspect of Spanish grammar is thus presented in a meaningful context and hopefully absorbed better by the language learner.

SPANISH GRAMMAR EXERCISES © Barbara Kuczun Nelson

SELECT ANOTHER SUBJUNCTIVE EXERCISE: ▾

FORMAS DEL PRESENTE DEL SUBJUNTIVO - EJERCICIO 1

Complete the dependent clause with the correct form of the verb indicated in the present subjunctive. If there is an error in your answer, any incorrect letters will be replaced by the symbol = . Try again! Click here if you need instructions for **making accents on a Mac or a PC**

Fill in the forms of the present subjunctive .

1. ...que yo (desayunar)

2. ...que Alicia (escribir)

SH GRAMMAR EXERCISES © Barbara Kuczun Nelson

SELECT ANOTHER SUBJUNCTIVE EXERCISE: ▾

FOR SELECT ANOTHER SUBJUNCTIVE EXERCISE:

Ex #1 - Present subjunctive forms
Ex #2 - Present subjunctive forms
Ex #3 - Present subjunctive forms
Ex #4 - Subjunctive vs indicative
Ex #5 - Subjunctive vs indicative
Ex #6 - Subjunctive - verbs of influence
Ex #7 - Subjunctive - verbs of emotion
Ex #8 - Subjunctive - verbs of doubt
Ex #9 - Subjunctive/Indicative - adj clauses
Ex #10 - Subjunctive/Indicative - adv clauses
Ex #1 - Imperfect subjunctive forms
Ex #2 - Imperfect subjunctive - adj clauses
* Self-check verb chart - present subjunctive
* Self-check verb chart- imperfect subjunctive
-->Go to Ojalá que llueva café Main Page
-->Go to Spanish Grammar Exercises

complete the depend
ere is an error in
x here if you need

in the forms of

1. ...qu

2. ...qu

3. ...qu

4. ...qu

5. ...que yo (reconocer)

6. ...que ellas (practicar)

We can see that such rich interactive tools can make the Web a powerful aid in developing FL reading skills. These tools are made possible through the use of Dynamic HTML and JavaScript which together modify the way the links work. Normally a WWW link appears as underlined text in a different color from that of the main text. The color varies depending on whether the link has been followed. The result of clicking on an ordinary link is that the original page disappears as it is replaced by a new page. Dynamic HTML lets us modify the appearance of links to make the difference between the linked text and the main text less distracting to the reader. In the case of the "Ojalá que llueva café" page, the linked text is not underlined and the color does not change when the text is clicked. A JavaScript utility alters the function of the link by allowing new information appear without making the text disappear. In this case, the cues appear in a "layer," which is an HTML structure representing an area that appears to be

superimposed on the main page. Cues appear and disappear as the layers are changed from visible to invisible.

Slightly different techniques can be used to provide similar features. In a page by one of the authors of this column the song "[J'ai tout quitté pour toi](#)" by Patricia Kaas is presented for study at the beginning level. In this case, the links are made less distracting by using underlining but making links the same color as the rest of the text. Clicking on one of these links makes a cue appear in a new window, though the window containing the original text remains visible to the reader. Thus, similar if somewhat different aspects of HTML and JavaScript are used to accomplish similar goals in these two sites.

One problem for the teacher wishing to make such annotated texts available to students is the issue of copyright. In these cases the purpose of the pages is clearly pedagogical and care has been taken to prevent the copying of the songs which has become such a concern in many mp3 Internet sites. On the "Ojalá que llueva café" page, the song has been cut up into small segments and the author has been in contact with the publisher about the project. On the "J'ai tout quitté pour toi" page the music is not available outside the local language lab. Thus in both cases the music cannot be simply downloaded from the site as is the case on the illegal mp3 sites which have been so much in the news of late.

The Web is a great source of material for extensive reading that is so important for developing literacy, but finding texts at an appropriate level for a particular student remains a problem. By adding annotation to ease the process, such texts become accessible to a wider audience at a variety of reading levels. As more and more texts appear online, we expect that the Internet has the potential to become a highly useful extension of our library facilities as we plan programs to develop our students' reading skills.

REFERENCES

- Knutson, E. K. (1998, December). Reading with a purpose: Communicative reading. [Tasks for the foreign language classroom](#). ERIC Digest [On-line]. Retrieved August 22, 2000, from the World Wide Web: http://www.cal.org/ericcll/digest/reading_digest.html.
- Omaggio Hadley, A. (1993). Teaching language in context. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.